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*Main Article:*

# **The Light and Shadow of Feminist Research Mentorship: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Faculty-Student Research**

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## **Abstract**

“Research assistant” is a term used to describe student researchers across a variety of contexts and encompasses a wide array of duties, rewards, and costs. As critical qualitative scholars situated in a discipline that rarely offers funded research assistantships to graduate students, we explore how we have engaged in faculty-student research in one particularly understudied context: the independent study. Using narrative writing and reflection within a framework of collaborative autoethnography, the first three authors reflect as three “generations” of protégés who were each mentored through independent studies during their MA programs by the fourth author. We explore the environmental context, mentor facets, and protégé facets that highlight the light and shadow, or successes and struggles, of our mentoring relationships. Reflecting on our

own experiences of collaborative research through independent studies, we suggest a model for feminist research mentorship that may be enacted across disciplines.

**Index Terms:** critical qualitative research; research collaboration; mentoring; feminist mentorship; independent study; research assistantships; autoethnography; researcher identity

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Research assistantships provide a vital learning opportunity for graduate students across disciplines, especially when future career success depends on scholarly productivity. However, “research assistant” is a broad label that encompasses an array of contexts, duties, rewards, and costs. As graduate students and faculty (i.e., academic staff) in the communication discipline who do critical qualitative research, we are intrigued by the different ways faculty and graduate students conduct research together. Because most communication departments in the United States fund graduate students largely through teaching assistantships and have been slow to embrace research grants (Hecht & Parrott, 2002), much research between faculty and graduate students must be accomplished outside funded research assistantships.

Through a process of writing and reflection, we offer insight into collaborative research between faculty and students in an understudied research context: unfunded research assistantships through independent studies. The first three authors—Jennifer, Julia, and Brielle—reflect as three “generations” of protégés (also known as “mentees”) who each were mentored in independent study contexts at different times by the fourth author—Patricia. We adopt a light and shadow metaphor in order to explore our experiences of what we term *feminist research mentorship*, where light represents our successes and shadow represents our struggles. This metaphor not only allows us to reflect on the less desirable aspects of our mentoring relationships, but also opens up the opportunity to acknowledge the complex and multidimensional facets of feminist research mentorships on both scholarly and personal levels. In the following sections we (a) review the literature on faculty-student research, (b) describe our method of collaborative autoethnography, (c) define the facets of our mentoring relationships, and (d) offer a model for feminist research mentorship that we find especially suited for research assistantships enacted through independent studies.

## 1. The Light and Shadow of Faculty-Student Research

Graduate students across disciplines work with faculty on research in a variety of contexts. First, students may be paid or unpaid research assistants on faculty research, often tasked with reviewing literature (Landrum & Nelsen, 2002; Paglis, Green, & Bauer,

2006). Second, students may work with professors on research projects in class (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Third, students may work with their faculty adviser on their thesis or dissertation (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). Fourth, students may work on their adviser's research, their own research, or collaborative research in an independent study context. This final type of collaborative research relationship is often less defined and less hierarchical than other forms of faculty-student research, allowing graduate students to become full and active participants in a joint research process (Jiao, Kumar, Billot, & Smith, 2011). The independent study setting is especially suited for collaboration because students are not constrained to faculty's existing research projects (as paid research assistants are), class requirements and timelines (as students in seminars are), or producing an independent research project (when writing dissertations or theses).

Collaborative research projects benefit from mentoring relationships and mentoring relationships benefit from collaborative environments (Shore, Toyokawa, & Anderson, 2008). According to Bell (2000), "A mentor is someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone" (p. 54). Although little consensus exists on an exact definition, scholars generally agree that mentors should assist the protégé with growth and accomplishment, professional development, role modeling, and psychological support (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997). Buzzanell's (2009) concept of spiritual mentorship elaborates on this collaborative definition by linking mentorship to spiritual values "so that development of the whole person can be undertaken in both relational roles" (p. 21). A successful mentor therefore facilitates interpersonal growth and well-being in addition to learning.

Mentorship in independent studies is particularly relevant to critical qualitative MA students, considering the relatively small number of research grants—and therefore paid research assistantships—awarded to critical qualitative research in the social sciences. For example, the (U.S.) National Science Foundation grants awards specifically for psychology and sociology research but not for communication research, and the communication discipline has been slow to prioritize and support grant writing (Hecht & Parrott, 2002). Although few studies could be located on the unique context of terminal master's programs (graduate programs where no PhD is offered), Olson, Meyers, and Wilkum (2003) found that the reputation of an applicant's MA program was a critical factor for PhD admissions committees in communication departments. Successful mentorship in terminal master's programs may therefore be beneficial to both the success of future PhD students as well as to the reputation of master's programs.

In addition to considering the benefits of mentorship, we consider what underlying factors contribute to the success and failure of mentoring relationships. According to Kalbfleisch (2002), "Communication is central to the initiation, maintenance, and repair of mentoring relationships" (p. 63). Graduate students use a variety of strategies to initiate mentoring relationships, including ensuring contact with the faculty member and searching for similar interests (Waldeck et al., 1997). Successful mentoring relationships also include reciprocal self-disclosure between mentor and protégé (Shore et al., 2008) and expressed interpersonal boundaries (Schwartz, 2011). Furthermore, advisers'

credibility relates to the amount of perceived mentoring advisees received from their adviser, and advisers' communication competence relates to advisees' perception of adviser mentoring (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). Research has shown that previous experience of being mentored is associated with willingness to mentor others (Ragins & Scandura, 1999) and a mentor's style is often adopted from their former mentor (K. A. Griffin, 2012). The literature illustrates how mentoring is important not only for the immediate mentor-protégé relationship, but also for future mentoring relationships and arguably the health of the discipline.

Given the academic and personal benefits of mentorship, we would expect mentorship to be a standard practice across disciplines; however, successful mentoring relationships are not easily achieved and even the best mentors encounter problematic mentoring relationships (Johnson & Huwe, 2002). Eby, McManus, Simon, and Russell (2000) explained the dark or shadow side of mentoring relationships due to: (a) poor match within the dyad, (b) distancing behavior, (c) manipulative behavior, (d) lack of mentor expertise, and (e) general dysfunctionality. Scholars have created multiple typologies of the shadow side of mentorship (for a review see Carr & Heiden, 2011), illustrating how mentorship is initiated, maintained, and repaired through complex and ongoing communicative processes. Considering the positive possibilities and the negative outcomes of some mentoring relationships, we find it worthwhile to investigate what forms of mentorship foster success, grounded in our own experiences.

One type of mentorship that embraces open communication and collaboration is *feminist mentorship*. Humble, Solomon, Allen, Blaisure, and Johnson (2006) identified four themes of feminist mentorship in family studies: (a) considering self-disclosure related to gendered topics of study, (b) critically analyzing power, (c) demystifying academic processes, and (d) working toward social change. These themes reveal that not only do feminist mentors provide advice and support to students, but also incorporate the critical paradigm's central tenets of self-reflexivity, power, and activism into the mentoring process. Feminist mentorship may also be of great importance to female graduate students who have fewer female faculty role models within the masculine institution of higher education, where a higher percentage of faculty are men and many mentoring relationships occur between men (Dua, 2007). Feminism is also concerned with the intersections of race and class with gender; however, race and class have often been marginalized in feminist scholarship (Carrillo Rowe, 2000) and in organizations (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Patton, 2004). In cross-cultural academic mentoring, power relationships can be further magnified (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002).

As four women from varying socioeconomic and racial backgrounds who characterize our mentorships as having similar successes and struggles, we find that feminist mentorship best describes our research relationships discussed in this manuscript. Although we could not locate any research that specifically focuses on feminist *research* mentorship, we frame our research experience within the body of literature on feminist mentorship in general. We acknowledge that feminist research mentorship is highly individual and idiosyncratic, so our reflections are not meant to be prescriptive; rather, our reflections are meant to add to the dialogue on feminist mentorship in faculty-student

research. As previously mentioned, this essay considers the narratives of three “generations” of communication students who were mentored by Patricia Geist-Martin at San Diego State University (SDSU) during their two-year, terminal master’s education. Woven together, the narratives of the protégés and their mentor articulate what generally goes unstated: What contributed to our successful feminist research mentorships? What challenges were faced in our feminist research mentorships?

## **2. Narrative Reflection of Three Mentoring Relationships**

To make sense of our research mentorships, we engaged in a collaborative process of iterative writing and reflection. In the sections that follow we offer a description of the profiles of the authors and then outline our process of data generation and analysis.

### **2.1. Author Profiles**

Jennifer Scarduzio (PhD, Arizona State University) is an Assistant Professor at Lamar University. Between 2006 and 2008, Jennifer enrolled in two independent studies with Patricia. Jennifer completed her first independent study focusing on the topic of sexual harassment during her first year of the MA program, resulting in two conference papers (Scarduzio & Geist-Martin, 2007a, 2007b) and two publications (Scarduzio & Geist-Martin, 2008, 2010). Jennifer completed her second independent study on the intersections of health and organizational communication during her second year, but continued to collaborate with Patricia during the first two years of her doctoral program, resulting in one conference paper (Geist-Martin & Scarduzio, 2008), one book chapter (Geist-Martin & Scarduzio, 2011), and one journal article (Scarduzio, Giannini, & Geist-Martin, 2011).

Julia Moore is a doctoral student at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Julia met Patricia in August 2010 when she enrolled in Patricia’s Gendering Organizational Communication seminar. In January 2011, Patricia invited Julia to work on her ethnographic research on integrative health centers. Julia enrolled in one independent study but collaborated on this research until graduating in May 2012, publishing one journal article (Sharf, Geist-Martin, Cosgriff-Hernandez, & Moore, 2012) and one book chapter (Sharf, Geist-Martin, & Moore, 2013). Patricia also advised Julia’s thesis research on voluntary childlessness in fall 2011, and shortly after, Julia and Patricia published a book chapter on this topic (Moore & Geist-Martin, 2013).

Brielle Plump graduated with her master’s degree from San Diego State University in spring 2013. Patricia served as Brielle’s assigned temporary adviser during her first year, allowing them to discover overlapping research interests. In fall 2011, Brielle took Patricia’s Health Communication seminar with Julia; after expressing interest in Patricia and Julia’s research on integrative medicine, Brielle was invited to join their team in January 2012. Brielle and Patricia have presented their ethnographic research at two communication conferences (Geist-Martin, Sharf, & Plump, 2013; Plump & Geist-Martin, 2012). Brielle is currently finishing her thesis on narrative in integrative

medicine, and published one journal article (Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013) and is now working on her second publication submission with Patricia.

Patricia earned her PhD in 1985 from Purdue University and has mentored close to 200 graduate students over the past 30 years, worked with research assistants, and directed over 110 theses and three dissertations at five different institutions. She has published three books and over 60 articles and book chapters, and has been honored with 20 awards for teaching or mentoring, including the Francine Merritt Award from the National Communication Association for Outstanding Contributions to the Lives of Women in Communication (2011), the Outstanding Mentor Award from the Master's Education Section of the National Communication Association (2008), the Feminist Teacher/Mentor Award from the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language and Gender (2002), and the Quality of Life Award from the Advocates for Women in Academe (1997).

## **2.2. Data Generation and Analysis**

The narrative accounts we present in this article utilized collaborative autoethnography, a qualitative research method “that focuses on self-interrogation but does so collectively and cooperatively within a team of researchers” (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013, p. 17). We engaged in “concurrent collaboration,” where “all researchers engage in the research process steadily, often mixing individual activities with collective activities” (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013, p. 44). Essentially, we socially construct our experience of feminist mentoring and in doing so discover the complexity of this type of relationship (Geist-Martin et al., 2010). First, in order to generate our biographical materials, we independently wrote self-reflexive narratives describing our experiences of working with Patricia through independent studies. Jennifer, Julia, and Brielle focused on their history of meeting with Patricia and working with her in different roles. These narratives highlighted the contributions of Patricia as a mentor and the developing mentor-protégé relationships. After beginning an iterative process of analysis and writing, the protégés then wrote a second narrative that self-reflexively explored their own contributions to their individual mentoring relationships with Patricia. Patricia wrote a single self-reflexive narrative about her approach as a mentor and her successes and struggles with mentoring a variety of students.

Second, we engaged in open coding (Tracy, 2013) to draw out our understanding of ourselves as mentor and protégés. As our discussion progressed, we identified clear patterns across our accounts. While writing, coding, and reviewing the literature on mentorship, we chose to situate our results within K. A. Griffin's (2012) mentoring framework because it provided a strategy for “dealing with multiple voices” in the collaborative autoethnographic process (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013, p. 128). In other words, K. A. Griffin's framework helped us to render intelligible our experiences as mentor and protégés in the independent study context. We also found K. A. Griffin's framework to be useful for understanding our experiences of feminist research mentorship, where the facets of the environment, mentor, and protégé intertwine to create the institutional and relational power structures that enable and constrain research

collaboration. Therefore, we frame our results by describing patterns that emerged across our narratives that highlight environmental factors, mentor facets, and protégé facets.

Third, we divided these three results sections; one author drew on all four narratives in order to code and categorize (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013) similarities across our narratives relevant to the environmental context, mentor facets, or protégé facets. We then alternated between group and solo work by emailing our sections to each other for review and by participating in Skype conversations about our drafts to collectively decide: (a) whether our narratives successfully described the facets of the environment, mentor, and protégé, and (b) the key points to be covered in the discussion. We then engaged in a second process of critical reflection and writing where we individually and collaboratively explored the shadows of each mentor and protégé facet we initially identified as positive. Through our analysis of our own mentor-protégé relationships, we offer the light and shadow, successes and struggles, in each facet of our mentoring relationships.

### **3. Facets of the Mentoring Relationships**

We find a light and shadow metaphor particularly useful for making sense of our experiences as mentors and protégés. According to K. A. Griffin (2012), “relationships mentors form are influenced by three dimensions” (p. 30) adapted from Hunt and Michael’s (1983) mentoring framework: the environmental context of the organization, characteristics of the mentor, and characteristics of the protégé(s). Because the purpose of our paper is to critically reflect on our own feminist research mentorships, we adopt K. A. Griffin’s (2012) model in order to make sense of our mentoring relationships through the light and shadow across our: (a) environmental context, (b) mentor facets, and (c) protégé facets.

#### **3.1. Environmental Context**

According to K. A. Griffin (2012), the environmental context of mentorship may include a wide range of features, from the “characteristics of the organization (e.g., size, geographic location, culture)” (p. 30), to the campus climate and institutional mission. Because we collaborated on research in the same department, this section provides an overview of the setting of our feminist research mentorships, and is meant to provide background information about the unique setting of our shared environment. Environmental context is important to consider because the environment lends insight into the institutional structures that enable and constrain the way research mentorship may be enacted. Ferguson (1984) tells us that alternative forms of organizing (nonpatriarchal forms of meaning and identity) are important to consider in light of typical bureaucratic forms that may exclude women’s voices. In our analysis, we identified two facets of the environmental context that facilitated our mentoring relationships: (a) the terminal master’s setting, and (b) the independent study context. First, the structure of the terminal master’s program offered the mentor and the protégés the opportunity to work closely together with a small group of students. Each year, Patricia agrees to be thesis adviser to three to five students, when many of her colleagues

in communication departments with PhD students must work with two or three times that many advisees. Similarly, in a terminal master's program, students do not have to compete with doctoral students for face time with their adviser. In many terminal master's degree programs in the communication discipline, including San Diego State University, students choose whether to take comprehensive exams or write a thesis, further cutting down on the competition for adviser time.

A second facet of the environmental context that facilitated our feminist research mentorships was the opportunity for students to enroll in up to two independent studies during their master's program. Independent studies at SDSU may focus on students' research, faculty research, or collaborative research that draws on both; either way, students have the opportunity to work with a faculty member who agrees to advise or collaborate through the entire research process. This opportunity is not present in the classroom due to the professor's inability to advise 10-20 research projects while teaching material during a single semester. The independent study context, then, is an especially relevant space for engaging in research mentorships. We explore Patricia's mentor facets in order to make sense of the light and shadow, or successes and challenges, experienced during our feminist research mentorships.

### **3.2. The Light and Shadow of Mentor Facets**

Protégés' narratives revealed that mentoring relationships included both professional and affective qualities that were simultaneously beneficial and challenging. In the sections below, the voices of the three protégés describe the light and shadow of five mentor facets Patricia embodied: openness, motivation, enthusiasm, humility, and guidance.

#### **3.2.1. Openness**

The first mentor facet, openness, encompassed many behaviors across our narratives, including Patricia's openness to working with us outside the classroom. Many professors work with students, but in our independent studies, Patricia took her openness one step further to engage in collaborative research that was co-constructed through open dialogue between mentor and protégé. Jennifer mentioned, "Patricia used the independent study to teach me how to do something. But most importantly, she would *show* me, not tell me. We did it together." Brielle also revealed, "She never misses an opportunity to share her wisdom," and Julia stated, "From the beginning, we discussed the ongoing nature of our research collaboration." Our narratives illustrate how Patricia worked to foster and stir our researcher identities by being open with her scholarship, her suggestions, and her time. Patricia's openness awakened the light within each of us to become engaged in the research process. Patricia's openness was also fostered through her openness on a personal level. In feminist mentorship, being open to the personal is essential in academic work (Humble et al., 2006).

Although the light side of openness enabled the success of our feminist research mentorships, we acknowledge the difficulty in reciprocating Patricia's openness as younger scholars still trying to figure out goals, skills, and questions. In this sense,



openness was at times burdensome when we had concerns that we preferred to keep private, illustrating how reciprocal self-disclosure (Shore, Toyokawa, & Anderson, 2008) was not always positive. Brielle wrote,

While working on a project with Patricia, a participant and I shared a brief and private interaction where the two of us ended up sharing intimate concerns. When I debriefed Patricia on the interaction, I felt pressure to tell her each of our stories. I felt pressure to maintain openness with Patricia, yet unwilling to tell the details of someone else's story. Furthermore, I was not ready to be vulnerable about my own story.

Jennifer described how "For example, if we were working on a project and Patricia had a question or needed advice, she would call me on my cell phone—no matter the time of day or day of the week." Similarly, Julia recounted how she "became upset when Patricia became upset when I did not walk at my master's graduation, even though graduations are not an important ritual for my family and graduation gown rentals are expensive." For Jennifer and Julia, their relationships with Patricia sometimes infiltrated their personal lives too much, though they simultaneously acknowledge that their personal relationships with Patricia were vital to their collaborative success. Openness, then, was not always a positive facet; openness needed to be strategically managed across personal and academic contexts in order to foster productive and comfortable feminist research mentorships.

### **3.2.2. Motivation**

A second mentor facet described in all three of our narratives was Patricia's ability to be motivating, inspiring us to engage in the research process. When describing a time that she was feeling overwhelmed, Brielle explained how Patricia was "slowly planting seeds to get me to slow down and find a way to relate all my tasks together, not to separate them." Brielle went on to mention, "Her suggestion, which came without force or demand, was not far from what my mind had already been pondering, but her advisory tone propelled my ideas into action." As the example reveals, Patricia's method of motivation helped us to develop our own research ideas by nudging us on an interesting path.

An important way Patricia motivated us was by challenging us in a way that did not feel critical. Jennifer wrote, "She has the ability to push people further than they think they can go," Julia echoed, "She challenges and encourages," and Brielle explained, "She never lets me quit, and constantly asks me if I want to take on more." Patricia's motivation instilled a sense of persistence and determination into us through constant encouragement and critique. However, she never forced her own researcher identity upon us. Julia explained that Patricia "does not try to critique my writing based on her personal stylistic preferences, encouraging me to grow as a writer rather than become a carbon copy or clone (Buell, 2004) of her." She pushed us to go further and try harder, but did not necessarily encourage us to follow directly in her footsteps.

Although we all acknowledge motivation as contributing to the success of our feminist research mentorships, the expectations behind Patricia's motivation were often daunting. Brielle described how "I worry that if I fail I will have failed her in some way." Julia recounted,

A time when our research relationship was less than ideal was when I was tasked with too large of project (i.e., finding out how to write a grant) and then Patricia did not follow up with me enough. Although our mentor-protégé relationship was collaborative, I still needed structure like meeting times, due dates, and specific tasks in order to contribute to our research.

As illustrated through Brielle and Julia's narratives, the light of motivation became shadowed when tasks were too much to handle or were not followed up on. Even though feminist mentorship breaks down hierarchies (Humble et al., 2006), we acknowledge that power differentials still exist between mentor and protégé, where Patricia's power as motivator could be daunting.

### **3.2.3. *Enthusiasm***

A third mentor facet that helped awaken our researcher identities was Patricia's enthusiasm. Patricia communicated enthusiasm, passion, and joy for her research and for the journey of the independent study. Julia described, "I do remember thinking that she was an example of an excellent teacher right from the start with her enthusiasm." Indeed, all three of our narratives described situations where we recognized Patricia's enthusiastic nature from the first moment we met her. And while we all intended to work with Patricia prior to our first meeting, the light side of this particular facet drew us in even more.

In addition to being open and motivating, we found Patricia's enthusiasm to be contagious—others enjoy being around her because she makes life more fun, exciting, and fulfilling. For example, Jennifer explained how Patricia "made me feel excited to be a communication major." However, Jennifer also wrote:

[Patricia's] enthusiasm made me feel like I should not be taking a break from our work together. In other words, even on weekends and no matter the time of day, I should be willing to drop what I am doing and work on a project. At the time, I did not necessarily view this behavior as an intrusion of privacy. However, I do realize now that the unpredictability of when and why Patricia would contact me did create some issues in regard to negotiating healthy boundaries in our relationship.

This shadow side of enthusiasm highlights the tension in feminist research mentorship between personal relational rewards and privacy; we highly valued Patricia as a friend, but found the type of casual communication that occurs between friends to be difficult to manage when applied to our research relationships.

### **3.2.4. Humility**

Our narratives highlighted the significant impact of a fourth mentor facet: humility. We found Patricia's ability to be humble, modest, and unselfish to be crucial during our independent studies. This humility may be more easily fostered in independent studies in comparison to research assistantships. Julia recounted:

Although my role could certainly be labeled as an "RA," I do not find the term to be particularly useful for describing my academic and personal relationship with Patricia; I did not simply assist her with research duties but was rather a co-collaborator.

It takes a degree of humility on the part of any mentor to co-collaborate with protégés and not just assign them menial tasks. Patricia exemplified this with her confidence in our abilities and also in the humility she communicated in valuing the viewpoints we offered in our collaboration. The facet of humility extends to an understanding of the power difference between mentor and protégé as well. Brielle elaborated on her relationship with Patricia:

She takes the time to ask what I think while sharing her own suggestions, because she understands how her position as a professor and my position as student each provide unique contributions to our research . . . those contributions exist on a level plane, each with their own value and restrictions.

Patricia's humility fostered an equal exchange of knowledge and ideas without fear of judgment or dismissal. Although we did not find a shadow side in Patricia's humility, Jennifer contrasted Patricia as a mentor with other mentors she has had:

I have had a few mentors who were less humble and open with authorship than Patricia. For example, when I worked with Patricia on an article we would collaborate together throughout the revise and resubmit process. However, in another situation, I have been asked to complete the entire revision myself with little to no collaboration from my mentor. Yet, despite the lack of collaboration the mentor still expected to be an author on the piece.

As evidenced from this example, we had to negotiate complex situations and power dynamics in terms of authorship with Patricia. For all of us, Patricia recognized the power difference between mentor and protégé and did not abuse it. As Brielle revealed, "I have never felt like her subordinate, or like she has forgotten what it is like to be a student." Humility therefore works in tandem with the other mentor facets to strengthen the collaboration between the mentor and protégé.

### **3.2.5. Guidance**

Our narratives described a fifth mentor facet—the invaluable guidance that Patricia offered that helped to socialize us into our future careers as assistant professors. Jennifer indicated, “I learned how to attend professional conferences, how to go to business meetings at conferences, how to write cover letters to editors of journals, and how to deal with difficult review processes.” Julia revealed, “She also gives endlessly, forwarding me information on scholarships and calls for manuscripts, offering to revise my writing.” Thus, we saw no end to Patricia’s guidance, even though our independent studies were only officially one or two semesters long.

Patricia also has become a trusted adviser and friend by guiding us to find a balance in our professional and personal lives, prompting us to be open about our individual needs. As Brielle described, “She allows me to share what I have learned and what I hope to accomplish, and helps me build bridges between my more affective personal goals and my professional and technical skills.” In other words, we found the ability to cultivate both a personal and professional relationship with Patricia to be of critical importance. As Julia detailed, “Patricia is a friend and a mentor, expecting rigorous work but offering help and praise when deserved and needed.” Patricia adjusted her own researcher identity to help us develop our own.

Guiding the development of our own researcher identities often had a shadow side. Brielle described how “when I disagree I am caught between following her advice and following my own instincts.” Julia recalled, “If Patricia recommends you do something, you better do it or have a good reason not to,” sometimes leading her to agree with Patricia because it was easier and less time consuming than doing the research necessary to justify a counter perspective. Guidance, then, was not always positive, but rather a power struggle where Patricia’s viewpoint was sometimes privileged over ours.

### **3.2.6. Summary**

As revealed in the description of Patricia’s five mentor facets, our independent study experiences as protégés highlighted Patricia’s facets of openness, motivation, enthusiasm, humility, and guidance. In our feminist research mentorships, these facets often intersected to create experiences that we consider successful; however, each facet may also be embodied through its shadow side, highlighting the potential for power differentials to inhibit collaborative research. The mentor facets embodied in Patricia’s mentorship therefore reflect the light and shadow of feminist research mentorships, though we reflect on our mentorships as overwhelmingly positive experiences. Next, we offer protégé facets that enhance the illumination in mentor-protégé relationships.

## **3.3. The Light and Shadow of Protégé Facets**

It is difficult to know if the three protégés were drawn to Patricia because she embodied the five mentor facets, or if Patricia was drawn to the three protégés because of the facets they embodied. In the following text, Patricia offers her reflections of mentoring (denoted

in italics) by drawing on her own and the three protégés' narratives. The four facets shared by the protégés include: (i) mirrored similarity, (ii) passion for learning, (iii) proactive self-starter, and (iv) eagerness to embrace challenge.

### **3.3.1. Mirrored Similarity**

*The first protégé facet describes how the protégés see themselves as similar to me as their mentor, where I mirror the facets they want to embody as scholars. All three protégés enrolled as students in one of my courses in the first semester of their master's program, facilitating our mutual discovery of our similar interests. All three had heard through the grapevine that, while I was a respected and enthusiastic professor, I expected a great deal from my students, more than other professors. Julia wrote,*

I quickly learned of Patricia's reputation in the department among other graduate students. She was friendly, warm, and kind, but also hardcore. She expected much more of her students in seminars than any other faculty, requiring more assignments, more research participants, more readings, and more critical thought.

*Unlike most of their peers, these three protégés saw themselves as similar to me in that regard—they wanted to be challenged and I would challenge them. Jennifer upon meeting me in our first class together assessed that I cared deeply for my students. Jennifer viewed herself as similar to me and desired to be respected and cared for in her relationship with a mentor. In her words, "From the first moment she spoke, I was intrigued. . . . I could tell she cared deeply about what she was speaking. . . . It made me as a student feel that she cared deeply for me as well." Julia was the one to pinpoint our similarity even before she arrived on campus by reading my bio on the website. Julia wrote, "Ethnography, narrative, gender, and ideology immediately spoke to me, as did her interest in the outdoors." Brielle and I met before classes began at a department picnic. She discovered similarity between us in that first meeting:*

I learned that the professor who was smiling, laughing, telling jokes, and enjoying the food was none other than Patricia. . . . I felt empowered to proceed with my same knowledge and socially hungry attitude. . . . It opened up space for my bubbly, silly personality to surface.

*Interestingly, both Jennifer and Julia described themselves as individuals who are more introverted and independent workers. Yet, over the course of working together, Jennifer recounted how "Patricia helped me come out of my shell and not be too serious," and Julia suggested that working with me changed one aspect of her scholarly identity when she stated, "I gained a new understanding of collaboration through working with Patricia. I now see an even stronger connection between research and teaching." Mirrored similarity provided a way for the protégés to feel empowered to become better teacher-scholars.*

*Perhaps one of the reasons the protégés characterize our feminist research relationships as largely successful is because they did not find themselves too similar to me. Jennifer reflected on the shadow side of mirrored similarity when she wrote:*

I have encountered a downside of this characteristic. If the mentor and protégé are too similar, the relationship does not necessarily work. For example, if both the mentor and protégé are quiet and serious it may be hard to stimulate an enthusiastic collaboration. In my own experience, mentors that are too much like me are hard to work with because we both bring the same qualities to the table.

*Thus, mirrored similarity may have been what initially drew the protégés to work with me, but the dynamics of our relationships were largely successful due to our ability to complement each other in the collaborative process rather than simply agree with each other.*

### **3.3.2. Passion for Learning**

*From my first meeting with each of these three protégés, it was obvious that they shared a passion for learning that they brought with them from their upbringings. This facet led them to take the initiative to seek me out or agree when asked to collaborate with me on an independent study. Jennifer wrote, “My parents expected straight A’s and anything less than that was considered a disappointment. This has led me to be harder on myself than most and also to have a desire to please others.” She thrived in circumstances where those whom she admires are proud of her and what she accomplishes. Julia recounted, “I’ve always been interested in learning, a trait I attribute to my parents who are both academics.” She knew even as an undergrad that she wanted a PhD, and was driven to be involved in research that had practical value. Brielle described, “growing up with two parents who work in education (both are counselors in schools, my mom at a community college, my dad K-12) influenced a lot of my passion for learning.” She learned from them to be politically active, question everything, and to take initiative to educate herself. All three protégés’ passion for learning enhanced our feminist research mentorships in that they, in a sense, mentored me; a consistent pattern that enhanced my passion and led me to look for their guidance is that they were always one step ahead with a fascinating question, a new source they found, or a way of thinking that prompted new directions in our research.*

*Although the three protégés shared a passion for learning, passion is not a quality shared among all potential protégés. Julia observed,*

During my MA, I observed many of my classmates putting in the minimum effort to earn the maximum grade; I wanted to put in the maximum effort to not only pass the independent study, but also to reap scholarly rewards (i.e., publications), personal rewards (i.e., a long-lasting and fulfilling relationship with Patricia), and knowledge rewards (i.e., learn as much as I could).

*Passion for learning may further have a shadow side among students in the same department. Jennifer recounted, “Many of my classmates would joke to each other, ‘Oh are you feeling like Jennifer Scarduzio today’ to suggest that they were being highly productive.” A passion for learning accompanied by protégé status in a feminist research mentorship was therefore not always a positive facet in the eyes of other graduate students.*

### **3.3.3. Proactive Self-Starter**

*A third facet the protégés shared was their nature as proactive self-starters. They initiated connections, took on multiple projects, and completed them in a timely manner. In other mentoring relationships that have ended or not developed for one reason or another, I would find myself in a position of authority that I was uncomfortable with, nudging, monitoring, repeating, and expecting delays. Jennifer, Julia, and Brielle possess a proactive facet of their personalities that allowed them to ask questions, seek information from other sources, and skillfully manage their time. Our feminist research mentoring relationships were enriched when the protégés took the lead on reducing the power differential between us, where I did not need to take a position of authority.*

*Jennifer was proactive from day one. She stated, “I jumped at the opportunity to work with her. I sent her an email immediately and hoped with fingers crossed that not too many of my classmates had also emailed her.” In fact, not one other of the 20 students I had emailed seeking a research assistant responded to my email. Jennifer’s proactivity stemmed in part from her desire to reveal to others the qualities she admires in herself. As she stated about me, “I wanted to make her proud of me!” Julia was proactive through her careful reading of our website to locate and begin a relationship with a faculty member with whom she wanted to work. In Julia’s words, “Thinking strategically . . . I took a class with Patricia my first semester. . . . [I] was very interested in connecting right away with the faculty member who could possibly be my future thesis adviser.” I recognized Brielle’s proactive self-starter facet as her temporary adviser, meeting every three weeks. She was the only one of my three temporary advisees who came prepared with questions and followed through with tasks that I recommended. She stated, “[I] continued to cultivate a relationship with Patricia in hopes of working with her in some research capacity in the coming semesters.” I could see in Brielle, as her professor and adviser, that she was the kind of person who was already revealing the facets of her scholarly identity.*

*The illumination of the proactive self-starter facet in all three protégés revealed itself early on, as did their proclivity to seek out and thrive when they were challenged. They thrived in situations where they were challenged to question beyond the surface, to figure things out, to innovate, and to accomplish tasks that others might shy away from. However, a shadow side of being a self-starter was highlighted in the protégé’s narratives; the mentor is also responsible for being a self-starter and not placing too high expectations on protégés, as evidenced in Julia’s previous narrative about needing structure and Jennifer’s previous narrative about another mentor who was unhelpful with manuscript revisions. Even though these protégés flourished as proactive self-starters,*

*they desired a delicate balance of power between themselves and me, where we contributed equally yet they received motivation and guidance from me, the mentor, when needed.*

### **3.3.4. Eagerness to Embrace Challenge**

*The fourth facet the protégés shared was their eagerness to embrace any challenge I offered. To challenge someone means to test their capabilities or to set expectations that may be beyond what they expect of themselves. In reflecting on what I do as a mentor, I know that I do not calculate in advance how to challenge my protégés. Instead, almost without thinking, I communicate and interact with them as I would a colleague. I find enjoyment in collaborative scholarship in person, on a day-to-day basis. They all have embraced the challenge of becoming equal partners in collaborative research in a number of ways.*

*The protégés embraced the challenge of meeting with me on a regular basis, usually weekly, to accomplish tasks we set together. My experience with other protégés included unwillingness to meet on a regular basis, other commitments taking priority, and canceling our meetings. However, all three embraced the challenge of any task I set before them. I never asked, “Do you think you can do this?” Instead, we dialogued together to divide the workload and each of them took on tasks as if they knew what to do. For example, Jennifer described a situation where she was ecstatic to be challenged:*

I remember arriving to her house and having her hand me at least two boxes full of typed interview data. “Go read through this and tell me what you think is interesting,” she said. *I can’t believe it!* Not only was I getting to work with a professor who inspired me but she was going to let me choose what seemed of most interest to study. After many weeks of reading and considering, Patricia and I met at her house. I remember Patricia had a large purple legal pad where she was scribbling notes about the data as she read. I, too, was writing notes as I read through the data again—this time with Patricia at my side. We would read, stop, take notes, and discuss. And then read, stop, take notes, and discuss some more. It was a collaborative learning process. Patricia was teaching me how to code data. She was motivating me to look at the data in new ways and to see exciting connections.

Julia also embraced the challenge that our relationship offered:

The mentorship I received in my MA program was more than I expected. This was not only due to the faculty, but also due to my own initiative and willingness to take on extra work. I believe that Patricia wanted to work with me because I was focused and driven, had a high attention to detail and we clicked on a personal level. I was also willing to take criticism or direction and trust that she knew what she was talking about.



*Both of the narratives offered by Jennifer and Julia not only described our process of working together, but also clarified how and why they embraced challenge. However, it was only in reflecting back to write this piece did I learn how they questioned their abilities and struggled through some of their tasks.* Brielle described the circumstances of her struggle with the challenge but her eagerness to embrace it:

Being a research assistant and mentee to Patricia has not always come so easily. . . . I joined her research team when I was in my second semester at SDSU. I was excited for the opportunity and incredibly interested in the topic. She let me jump right in, and so I assisted the team with interviews, gaining IRB [institutional review board] approval, and learning about the structure of the clinic we planned to observe. Before I knew it, I was swimming in data and taking phone calls from prospective participants. I was also taking three classes, teaching, and working off campus.

*In writing this paper, I learned from their words how it is that the aforementioned mentor and protégé facets intersect to create successful feminist research mentorship.* Julia described how “Patricia’s spirit of openness, trust, collaboration, and rigor has allowed me to flourish as a scholar rather than simply a master’s student.” Brielle highlighted the challenge of learning how to become aware of her positionality.

She never wastes a moment to laugh, or a moment to teach me something new. She never lets me quit a task. . . . [S]he allows me to share what I have learned and what I hope to accomplish, and helps me build bridges.

Finally, Jennifer’s words shed light on what inspires a graduate student to embrace challenge:

A good mentor is someone who awakens something inside you. She or he stirs passion, interest, and intrigue in topics that at first glance may seem dull or mundane. They make you want to be a better scholar, teacher, and person.

*Julia “flourishes,” Brielle “bridges,” Jennifer “awakens,” and I witnessed their embrace of the challenges we created together. Through the critical examination of the light and shadow sides of each mentor and protégé facet, we begin to understand how young scholars are drawn to the light of immersion in scholarship and how the facets of these three protégés ignite and are ignited through feminist research mentorship.*

In the final section of our paper, we illuminate the multidimensionality of mentor-protégé relationships by describing lessons in practice that we draw from our experiences.

#### **4. A Model for Feminist Research Mentorship**

Our collaborative autoethnography reveals that feminist research mentorship was paramount to our academic and personal success as protégés and mentors. We

characterize our collaboration as feminist research mentorship, not because we are all women nor because we incorporate a critical lens into our qualitative research, but because our mentoring relationships transcended the academic independent study context to become: (a) highly collaborative with low power differentials, (b) highly rewarding on academic and personal levels, where the two are intertwined, and (c) highly influential to the protégés' identities as researchers, teachers, and future mentors.

Our experiences as graduate students and faculty at San Diego State University lead us to conclude that our independent studies provided a valuable and under-utilized context for engaging in research assistantships in our master's programs where funded research assistantships were absent. Although other models of research relationships may be enacted in independent studies, and the type of feminist research mentorship we embrace may be enacted in a variety of faculty-student research contexts, we find the independent study context to be free of many structurally and socially pre-determined barriers that arise in other contexts. These barriers include time constraints of the semester, expectations of independent research in thesis writing, and pre-determined hierarchical divisions of labor and power in traditional research assistantships, where research assistants literally "assist" faculty with little room for collaboration (Landrum & Nelsen, 2002). In our experience, the independent study context therefore encourages mentors and protégés to act as "mentor" and "protégé," or even "colleagues," rather than "researcher" and "assistant."

Feminist research mentorship fosters multiple benefits for critical qualitative master's students. Through our analysis we conclude that benefits for protégés include: (a) exploring new research areas, (b) participating in the qualitative research process from beginning to end, (c) collaborating with established faculty, and (d) deciding if pursuing a PhD and academic career is right for them. We find that the benefit of participating in the qualitative research process from beginning to end aligns with Humble et al.'s (2006) theme of demystifying academic processes in feminist family studies, which occurs when mentors share knowledge with protégés and become "active agent[s] of change in the process of teaching someone to negotiate a system that is often designed to scare and divide" (p. 6). However, our results contribute to an underexplored area of feminist *research* mentorship, where a feminist perspective may greatly enhance our understanding of how feminist mentorship can contribute to students' scholarly identities.

Furthermore, mentors are able to refine their academic identities as researchers, teachers, and mentors. Personal benefits include a life-long friendship between mentor and protégé, where "there is no planned ending or termination of the mentorship journey" (S. M. Griffin & Beatty, 2012, p. 270). Patricia reflects on the powerful web of relationships that is ever-expanding because there is no defined ending to these relationships:

*I have realized that my growth as a person has been exponential because of the time I devote to mentoring graduate students generally, but particularly the students who I work with through independent study. These are the students I miss the most when they move on, but they are also the ones that I stay closest in touch with, not only because the mentoring is mutual, but also*

*because they tend to build relationships mutually with each other from one generation to the next.*

At the same time, Patricia indicates that the shadow side of these close relationships is the sense of responsibility and obligation that expands exponentially.

Although we find that feminist research mentorship offers multiple benefits to protégés and mentor, we acknowledge that it is not always simple to enact because it requires the investment of time, energy, and emotion from both mentor and protégé; feminist research mentorship is collaborative in a way that not all faculty and students embrace and some may even resist. We further acknowledge that part of our success comes from our privileged educational backgrounds where learning was a value instilled in the protégés by their families from a young age. The question of how one learns to become a successful protégé given how raced and classed education and organizations are in the United States (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Patton, 2004) provides a valuable question for future research. Future research may also explore a variety of research mentorships characterized as feminist in order to understand the implications gender, race, and class have on the light and shadow of faculty-student research.

Writing and analyzing our narratives in a self-reflexive way proved to be a challenging process due to our geographical separation and overarching perception of our feminist research mentorships as overwhelmingly positive. The process of collaborative autoethnography ultimately shed light onto the struggles and power differentials that we had not considered during our experiences of feminist research mentorship; most importantly, we realize that a low, yet established power differential proved to be beneficial at times when the protégés were uncertain of their research abilities. We suggest collaborative autoethnography as a method for future researchers interested in engaging in critical autobiographical reflections of their own research mentorship. In writing our narratives, we acknowledge that feminist research mentorship is not immune to struggles like unexpressed interpersonal boundaries (Schwartz, 2011). However, unlike Eby et al. (2000) who framed the dark side of mentoring relationships as dysfunctional, our analysis suggests that light and shadow play a role in all mentoring relationships. The tensions we describe illustrate the delicate balance between light and shadow that must be uniquely navigated by both mentor and protégé in order to establish professionally and personally rewarding relationships, where the two are intertwined in feminist mentorship (Humble et al., 2006).

Overall, we find the benefits of feminist research mentorship to be great and this model for collaborative research may be useful to faculty and students from a variety of backgrounds. Future research should consider short and long-term reflections on the light and shadow of feminist research mentorships with the different and varying intersections of mentor and protégé identities, and further delve into when shadows can be positive in mentoring relationships. The following paragraphs summarize our take-away points from our mentorships that encourage other mentors and protégés to cultivate the most mutually beneficial mentor-protégé relationship possible.

First, we found it incredibly useful to schedule regular meetings every one or two weeks in order to keep track of what is being accomplished and to make sure we met goals that were rewarding for both parties. Upon reflection, we found regular meeting times to be beneficial in distributing and negotiating power between mentor and protégé. We found that challenging protégés to take on difficult tasks with the appropriate mentor support was highly rewarding for both mentor and protégé and helped foster research collaboration.

Further, we found this model of feminist research mentorship to be compelling for its potential ability to foster the continuation of collaborative mentorship for future generations (K. A. Griffin, 2012; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). One way Patricia facilitates this is by asking current protégés to offer formal and informal advice to incoming protégés. For example, mentors may schedule social events or meetings where incoming protégés share their work and seek advice from current protégés. Current protégés may be best equipped to share the light and shadow facets of their mentor, as well as strategies for maximizing personal and academic rewards.

Finally, we attributed our successful feminist research mentorships to our view of the independent study as a unique context where collaboration may flourish. By considering the independent study as more than an exchange of credit for work, we were able to learn from each other in ways that were not possible in thesis research or classroom research projects.

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